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Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat / Office of the Premier

Historic bilateral agreement signed (07/06/22)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) -- A new era in Aboriginal-provincial relations was ushered in today with the signing of the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Province of New Brunswick Relationship Building Bilateral Agreement in a ceremony at the Legislative Assembly in Fredericton.

(Multimedia)

The ceremony began with a traditional pipe ceremony and blessing from Maliseet and Mi'kmaq elders,as well as a gift presented to the elders by Justice and Consumer Affairs Minister and Attorney General T.J. Burke.

"This new bilateral agreement marks a new era in Aboriginal/provincial relations in New Brunswick that is the result of many long hours of hard work on the part of both levels of government," said Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour Minister Ed Doherty, Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs."This is truly a great day and a watershed moment for all New Brunswickers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, as we honour and celebrate this new era and new relationship between our two levels of government and the communities which make up this great province."

The presentation was followed by comments from Lt.-Gov. Herménégilde Chiasson, Chief Everett Martin from Eel River Bar First Nation, representing the Union of New Brunswick Indians, and Chief Gerald Bear from Tobique First Nation, representing the Mawiw Tribal Council.

"This agreement, if given the opportunity to work, can create an environment where the Province of New Brunswick and the Aboriginal communities can work together on a government to government basis," Martin said. "An important part of this agreement will be to create a level of trust so that both sides can better understand the other's position. There will be times that we disagree, but disagreement can be healthy. However, if the level of trust exists, then I am sure we can use this process to work through our disagreements to find solutions that will benefit everybody."

Following the signing ceremony, the signatories were presented with a commemorative box containing the signed agreement. After the presentation, Premier Shawn Graham spoke of the importance of the bilateral agreement and how it marks the beginning of a new

partnership between both levels of government.

"Our new relationship will be one of respect, good faith and partnership, one where we will work together to reconcile First Nations and Crown issues and jurisdictions from this day forward," Graham said. "It has been a personal goal of mine, as premier and as a member who proudly represents a riding with two very vibrant First Nations, to achieve a bilateral accord that provides real benefits to Aboriginal communities and a new way for us to work together."

Fostering a bilateral agreement with New Brunswick's First Nations was part of the government's *Charter for Change* commitment to improve relationships, and a key commitment of the recent Speech from the Throne and of the final report of the Self-Sufficiency Task Force.

"In order for New Brunswick to become self-sufficient, all our communities - including all 15 First Nations communities - must have the means to become self-sufficient," Graham said. "The accord we have signed today will enable Aboriginal communities to reduce inequalities, improve services and promote economic development."

The event ended with a closing ceremony from the elders, followed by a reception hosted by the lieutenant-governor at Old Government House.

The complete text of the agreement and audio and video of the signing ceremony are available on the Aboriginal Affairs website at: http://www.gnb.ca/aboriginal.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Background information follows. MEDIA CONTACTS: Marie-Andrée Bolduc, communications, Office of the Premier, 506-444-2286; Craig Chouinard, Communications New Brunswick, Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, 506-444-2519.

Backgrounder
Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Province of New Brunswick
Relationship Building Bilateral Agreement

The Province of New Brunswick and the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs of New Brunswick have reached a historic bilateral agreement, signed in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly on Friday, June 22, 2007.

The Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat (AAS) initiated meetings with the 15 First Nations chiefs to build positive relationships and to develop a process that would allow for fair and open discussion on issues of mutual concern.

These meetings highlighted common goals between the parties and strategies were then developed to achieve the common goals in a fair and open manner.

The bilateral agreement provides a framework going forward for the First Nations communities of New Brunswick and the provincial government to deal with outstanding issues in a productive manner and with mutual respect.

The accord provides for regular quarterly meetings between government ministers and First Nation chiefs and for bi-annual meetings between chiefs and the premier to discuss issues arising from the process outlined in the agreement.

This new relationship is intended to be one of respect, good faith and partnership, and represents a commitment on the part of both levels of government to reconcile First Nations and Crown issues and jurisdictions.

Fostering a bilateral agreement with New Brunswick's First Nations is an element of the government's *Charter for Change* commitment to improve relationships, and was a key priority of its first Speech from the Throne in February 2007.

This historic accord also fulfills a recommendation of the Province's Self-Sufficiency Task Force, to move aggressively to pursue a forum for dialogue with Aboriginals and establish arrangements to address Aboriginal and treaty rights.

This agreement represents a watershed moment for both levels of government, and is the first step towards the establishment of a modern treaty relationship between the provincial government and Aboriginal communities.

While a tripartite accord involving the federal government will continued to be pursued, the bilateral process will allow the Province and New Brunswick First Nations to move much faster to address issues which do not involve the federal government.

This agreement is a means for the New Brunswick government and New Brunswick Aboriginal communities to work together to achieve strong governments, social justice and economy sustainability for First Nations, which will be of benefit to all New Brunswickers.

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